

VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHKB #0833/01 2491338  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 051338Z SEP 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5929  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHMZ/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2967  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000833

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [ENRG](#) [KIRF](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE WELL  
RECEIVED, OBSERVERS LOOK TO NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Vice President Richard Cheney's September 3-4 visit to Baku was widely seen as significant and timely given concerns about energy and security in the wake of the Russian invasion of Georgia. Azerbaijan's media gave extensive and decidedly positive coverage to VP Cheney's visit, with the major focus on security cooperation and energy development. Implications for Nagorno-Karabakh were also the source of much speculation, in addition to a reported September 3 call from Russian President Medvedev to President Aliyev. Russian language daily Zerkalo noted that the Vice President's language on Nagorno-Karabakh suggests that the United States will bolster efforts to resolve the conflict. End Summary

#### A Warm Welcome for the Vice President

-----

¶2. (SBU) Azerbaijan's leadership offered an exceptionally warm welcome to Vice President Richard Cheney September 3-4 in Baku, with President Aliyev hosting events including a nearly 50-minute one-on-one meeting and a two and half hour small group meeting and dinner at the Presidential Palace on the Caspian Sea. During the preparations for the visit, Azerbaijan's security and protocol personnel were unusually cooperative, working constructively and efficiently with the Vice President's Advance Team and Embassy staff. The goodwill effort shown by the Presidential Apparatus and the Government of Azerbaijan overall reflected the great enthusiasm in Baku for the historic visit of the Vice President, the most senior U.S. official ever to come to Azerbaijan. Media reaction to the visit was also strongly positive, with the pro-government and opposition press largely in agreement on the timeliness and significance of the visit. Septels will report on the Vice President's meetings with President Aliyev and oil and gas representatives.

#### Focus on Security and Energy and Nagorno-Karabakh

-----

¶3. (SBU) Baku's media mainly focused on security cooperation and energy development in light of the Russia-Georgia conflict. Democracy development and Azerbaijan's October presidential elections were not discussed in the media. Predictably, journalists and other observers viewed the discussions, in light of regional events, primarily in terms of the impact of Nagorno-Karabakh. Interfax reported that the Vice President's main message to President Aliyev was

that "the United States wants peace and stability in the Caucasus," noting that regional security is dependent on resolution of the conflict. "Cheney voiced strong support to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the Karabakh settlement through negotiations based on territorial integrity principles and other international laws," Interfax wrote. The press service also reported that the Vice President valued Azerbaijan's contributions to regional energy cooperation.

¶4. (SBU) Turan Press Service picked up on the Vice President's central message to Azerbaijan. "President Bush has sent me here with a clear message to the Azerbaijani people and the whole region, that the U.S. has a deep and firm interest in your prosperity and safety." President Aliyev, in turn, told journalists that Azerbaijan-U.S. relations "are developing successfully," highlighting defense and security cooperation, international peacekeeping operations, energy development and economic consultations. Turan reported that President Aliyev confirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh was discussed at the meetings, noting that the U.S., as one of three Minsk Group co-chairs, plays a decisive role in the negotiating process.

#### Other News Reports More Speculative

-----

¶5. (SBU) Other news reports were more speculative, but still largely positive. Russian language daily Zerkalo, which typically runs counter to Moscow's views, reported that "Dick Cheney promised to guarantee the security of Azerbaijan." Pro-government daily Yeni Azerbaijan wrote that the Vice President's visit was Washington's attempt to "persuade its friends" that it is ready to cooperate further on security issues, noting that, following the conflict in Georgia, the U.S. has a "shaky" image in the region. Other observers suggested that the Vice President sought to "ease the jitters" of regional officials, who "have been unnerved by the evident vulnerability of export routes." Popular opposition daily Yeni Musavat concluded that VP Cheney's visit to Azerbaijan was to ensure support for the Nabucco natural gas pipeline project, including natural gas supply and transport across the Caspian.

#### Chattering Class Questions Aliyev's Balancing Act

-----

¶6. (SBU) Several Baku observers noted that President Aliyev's policy of balancing regional interests and striving to stay on good terms with all its neighbors -- Russia, Iran and Turkey -- as well as with the European Union "may no longer be viable." Rauf Mirgadirov, political commentator for Zerkalo, suggested that "Azerbaijan will have to make a difficult geopolitical choice." Experts stated that to date Azerbaijan, particularly in terms of energy policy, has cast its net with the West. Noting that President Aliyev and the GOAJ was "conspicuously neutral in its public pronouncements" following the outbreak of the Russia-Georgia conflict, some commentators suggested that Azerbaijan "cannot be considered a sure bet to stick with the United States and the European Union."

¶7. (SBU) Zerkalo also noted the Vice President's language on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, postulating that the increased tension in the region will "stimulate" the United States to take a more active role in resolving the stand-off. The Russian language daily, which has been increasingly aggressive lately in its anti-Russian coverage, noted that frozen conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh provide Russia with opportunities for meddling in the neighborhood. Stepped up U.S. efforts, the paper's editors suggested, would help keep Russia "out of its neighbors' business."

#### Ambassador Derse Follows Up Visit

-----

¶8. (SBU) After the Vice President's departure, Ambassador Derse told the Baku press that the Vice President's visit "signals a new phase in our bilateral relationship." She added that, "the Vice President's visit, which was planned for some time, was the logical step in our efforts over the

past several years to strengthen our partnership across the board, with strong dialogues on economics, energy, security and democracy." Turning to Nagorno-Karabakh, the Ambassador stated "as Vice President Cheney said, America strongly supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. We are committed to achieving a negotiated solution to the conflict -- a solution that starts with the principle of territorial integrity and takes into account other international principles. Achieving a solution is more important now than ever before; that outcome will enhance peace and stability in the region, and Azerbaijan's security as well."

#### Reports of Medvedev-Aliyev Call

-----

¶9. (C) Following the visit, Azerbaijan's press reported that Russian President Dmitry Medvedev had called President Aliyev on September 3. Details were not made public. Turan reported that Medvedev and Aliyev discussed "issues of mutual interest" and "expressed satisfaction with the successful development of relations." The reported phone call, which has not yet been officially confirmed, was analyzed in Baku as an indicator of Moscow's concern. On September 5, opposition newspaper Azadliq reported that the timing of the Russian President's call "was not incidental." Zerkalo wrote the same day that "Cheney's tour Causes Concern in Moscow."

#### Comment:

-----

¶10. (C) The Vice President's visit clearly came at an crucial time for Azerbaijan, and in Azerbaijan, successfully re-affirmed the USG's interest in the country and the region. The overwhelmingly positive and unusually unified coverage of this visit -- from pro-government and opposition media sources -- signifies the importance and timeliness of the visit to the Azerbaijani public. It also highlights the need for follow up action, particularly on the difficult question of Nagorno-Karabakh.

DERSE